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REMARKS OF ROBERT E. C. STEARNS, 1827-1907

ON THE LATE

PROFESSOR JOSEPH HENRY,

BEFORE THE

California Academy of Sciences,

MAY 20th, 1878;

AND

RESOLUTIONS OF THE ACADEMY,

June 17th, 1878.

MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY:—Death, which hath all seasons for its own, has just stricken from the roll of the living, one of the illustrious names of the century, a name eminent in intellectual, especially scientific circles, throughout the world. I refer, of course, to the late Prof. Joseph Henry, whose long life service to his country and to mankind as an educator and scientific investigator, and as the organizer and head of the Smithsonian Institution, placed him naturally, and justly, at the front, as the representative of science and scientific thought and culture in America—a position which he filled because of his high attainments, and the conspicuous nobility of his character, with exceeding credit to himself and to the manifest advantage of science and his country. A man of great, yet unassuming excellence, whosoever met him was at once impressed most favorably, by his quiet yet cordial greeting, his dignified, yet genial welcome. His native breadth of mind, his wide reading, correlated with and refined by an ample and generous philosophy, impelled him, even early in life, to regard not

this or that direction of study or path of knowledge, only, as worth the pursuing, but that the simple text or legend, "Knowledge should be pursued for its own sake," should stand as an axiom, resting upon the everlasting foundation of Truth. This made him appreciative of the special study and work of others, and his friendly interest and sympathetic words, stimulated and inspired the student, to continued and increased effort.

I will not recite by title in long enumeration, the many responsible positions he filled—the experiments, investigations and discoveries he made, or enlarge upon the numerous honors conferred upon him by the higher institutions of his own country, or repeat the tributes paid to his achievements by the highest intellectual and governmental authorities of foreign lands. Turning from these well-merited honors, acknowledgements not less of eminent ability than of scientific integrity and personal worth, we are led to survey the completed life, in its rounded term of eighty years, as a whole,—as we would view from afar, some stately tree whose lines are full of strength and beauty,—and we are curious to learn what benificent star was in the ascendant, what occult charm, what power of circumstance, nurtured and protected, and led him onward through the days of his youth, and lighted the path for his later years. In turning to his early life, to the time when he first went forth on its now completed voyage, we find that he was not born a favorite of fortune, as that term is usually understood, within an environment of luxury and ease; but, if we give a loftier and better definition to the phrase, we may well regard it as highly fortunate for him and for the world that he was born with a profound and abiding thirst, an irrepressible longing for knowledge, which determined his destiny and moulded his career—which led him upward and onward, though by no royal road devoid of labor.

Had his mind been colored at all by avarice, or the desire for wealth, or, if in his earlier years it had received the impress of commercial bias through experience in trade, he might, through his numerous and important discoveries, extended into inventions,—especially in electricity in its practical application,—have accumulated wealth as did others of less knowledge, who reaped in this productive field. His fortune so far as regards material wealth, was like that of others, of nearly all

of the great, the earnest and sincere teachers and philosophers, who have labored faithfully and unselfishly for the cause, who have sought, only with a single mind in all its strength—for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.

During the official term of President Fillmore, in addition to other numerous duties, he was appointed to the light-house board, a most important service, and his visit to this coast, which occurred a few years ago (September, 1871,) was in connection with said position; his presence at the Academy on one occasion, during this visit, will long be remembered by those who were present at the time.

His life is ended, but his memory will be cherished by all who knew him, and like the usefulness of his labors, shall endure for years. His career constitutes a monument, marking the advancement of human thought and the intellectual progress of the republic, in which he was so eminent a citizen.

On motion duly seconded, the Chair appointed a Special Committee of three, consisting of Professor John LeConte, Doctor A. Kellogg, and Mr. John M. Stillman, to which by special vote the Academy added the Chairman, to draft appropriate resolutions of appreciation and respect, and present the same at a future meeting.

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REGULAR MEETING, JUNE 17TH, 1878.

Vice President Edwards in the Chair.

The Special Committee appointed to prepare suitable Resolutions expressive of the sentiments of this Academy, in relation to the late PROFESSOR JOSEPH HENRY, beg leave to submit the following:

Whereas, in the death of our distinguished colleague, PROFESSOR JOSEPH HENRY, LL. D., American science has lost its Nestor, and this Academy one of its most honored members:

Be it Resolved; That in the scientific career of PROFESSOR HENRY, we recognize the highest and purest type of a man whose long life affords a beautiful commentary on the ennobling influences of the cultivation of true science.

Resolved, Second; That as an *original investigator*, we recognize the distinguished merit of PROFESSOR HENRY in the following respects, viz:

1. As being the first to develop the power of the Elec-

tro Magnet as actuated by an *intensity* or a *quantity* battery.

2. As the first to apply the Electro-Magnet in the invention of an Electro-Magnetic Telegraph.

3. As the first to invent a Machine to be moved by Electro-Magnetism.

4. For the application of the Electro-Telegraph to forecasting the Weather.

5. For the Plan of the "Smithsonian Institution" for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men, and the successful development of this Plan during an administration of more than thirty years as *Scientific Director* of this establishment.

6. For the improvement of "Fog Signals," in connection with the United States Light-house Board.

7. In addition to the foregoing, our colleague made important investigations and discoveries in Acoustics, in Capillary Attraction, in Radiant Heat, and in many other departments of physical science.

Resolved, Third; That it is a fortunate circumstance for American science, that a man of PROFESSOR HENRY's pure and exalted character was so long in a position in which, by the force of his earnest and uncompromising determination, he saved the "Smithsonian Fund" from diversion and absorption in a Public Library, and from various other schemes, and succeeded in devoting it to the legitimate objects of the Testator, viz. "*to the increase and diffusion of knowledge among mankind.*"

Resolved, Fourth; That it is equally fortunate for American science that the influence of the high scientific attainments no less than the rare personal qualities of our illustrious colleague at the seat of government, has done so much to arrest the tide of charlatanry and superficial half-knowledge, which threatens to overwhelm our country.

Resolved, Fifth; That a properly attested copy of these Resolutions, be sent to the honored widow of our deceased colleague.

JOHN LECONTE.

A. KELLOGG

J. M. STILLMAN.

R. E. C. STEARNS,

Of Special Committee.

